conduct tests and ultimately deploy missiles like Agni with capable war-head;

(d) whether there are any resource constraints for this purpose; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL): (a) China, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia are reported to possess short range and/or IRBM ballistic missiles.

(b) Government of India are committed to taking all necessary steps to safeguard its security and national interest in accordance with its own threat perceptions.

(c) Design, development and testing, leading to manufacture of missile system takes about 5 to 6 years depending upon the technical capability of the system and user trial programmes.

(d) and (e) Do not arise.

Achievement of ICCR

1837. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the main achievements and activities of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations since its inception;

(b) the modality for selecting its executive board; and

(c) whether Government propose to set up a Committee to review and re-appraise the functioning of the Council?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL): (a) to (c) Indian Council for Cultural Relations was formally set up in 1950 with the primary objective or establishing, reviving and strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries. It aims, as enunciated in the memorandum of Association, are:

— to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations;

— to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries;

— to promote cultural exchange with other countries and people; and

— to establish and develop relations with national and international organisations in the field of culture.

The Council has worked steadily to attain these objectives. The major activities of the Council include:

— Administration of scholarship schemes on behalf of the Govt. of India for international students;

— Exchange of scholars, academicians, opinion makers, artists and writers;

— Exchange of performaing art groups;

— Excchange of exhibitions;

— Organisation of and participation in seminars and symposia.

— Administration of the Jawaharlal Nehru Award.

— Organisation of the Maulanas Azad Memorial Lecture and Maulana Azad Essay Competition;

— Maintaining Indian Cultural Centres abroad and supporting special bilateral programmes.

— Establishing and maintaining chairs and professorships for Indian studies abroad;

— Publications;

— Presentation of books and musical instruments.

The details of the activities undertaken by the Council are included in the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs.

The composition and the procedures for constituting the statutory bodies of the Council, namely, the General Assembly, the Governing Body and the Finance Committee are laid down in

Article 4, Article 7 and Article 10 respectively of the Constitution of the Council.

The Standing Committee of Parliament on External Affairs periodically reviews the functioning of the Ministry of External Affairs and the ICCR. The Standing Committee had set up a special sub-committee to study the functioning of the ICCR and its report was presented to the Lok Sabha on 19th December, 1995 and was also laid in the Rajya Sabha on the same day.

A detailed action taken report on the various recommendations and observations of the Standing Committee had been submitted by the Ministry of External Affairs.

In view of this Government do not propose to set up a Committee to review the functioning of the Council.

Passport Issued in Punjab

1838. SHRI IQBAL SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of passports issued during the year 1996-97 from the various passport offices of the State of Punjab, district-wise; and

(b) the steps being taken by Government to provide passports at the earliest to the applicants of State?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL): (a) The number of passports issued district-wise by Regional Passport Office, Chandigarh during the year 1996-97 is given in the Statement (*see* below). The number of passports issued by Passport Office Jallandhar is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

(b) Several steps have been taken to simplify procedures with a view to issuing passports expeditiously. The major ones are: (a) issue of 20 year validity passport in addition to 10 year validity passports; (b) upgradation of office facilities including computerisation leading to faster screening and processing of applications; (c) simplification of passport and miscellaneous services forms; (d) issue of passports without any further wait for clearance in cases where police verification reports are not received within the prescribed time limit of four weeks; (e) thorough secrutiny of applications at the acceptance stage itself to check their completeness and correctness in all respects; (f) augmentation of staff strength to reduce and clear pendencies; (g) provision to issue passports in cases of emergency/urgency on out of turn basis on the strength of Verification Certificate issued by an authorised official; and (h) expansion of the list of officials authorised to sign verification certificates.

Statement

Number of Passports Issued District-wise by Regional Passport Office, Chandigarh

Rpo., Chandigarh:

	State	Distt.	1996	1997
A.	PUNJAB	BHATINDA	2691	523
		FARIDKOT	2108	389
		FATEHGARH SAHIB	2955	482
		FEROZEPUR	3536	596